

The Wallach Building  
(Commercial Building)  
88 East State Street  
Trenton  
Mercer County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-968

HABS  
NJ,  
11-TRET,  
27-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Wallach Building (Commercial Building)

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Location: 88 East State Street is the official address. Trenton, Mercer County, New Jersey.

Last Owner: Plapinger-Platt Down Town Properties

Last Occupant: N.J. Department of Environmental Protection (upper floor offices); Star Fashion (first floor 32 East State St.); Roth's Shoes (first floor 86 East State St.); Christian Science Reading Room (first floor 90 East State St.); Johnston Jewelers (first floor 96-98 East State St.); The Wigs Mode (first floor 1 North Broad St.); Colonial Farms Meats & Poultry (3-9 North Broad St.).

Last Use: Commercial

The building at 88 East State Street was demolished in September 1987 to make way for new commercial construction.

Significance: The Wallach Building is a commercial building erected on the corner of State and Broad Streets, the heart of downtown Trenton. The modern steel frame building with greatly simplified classical detailing replaced nine individual 19th century buildings which had crowded together on this site. Planned in the Roaring Twenties, but completed during the Depression, the Wallach Building was the most modern building in this block of downtown. The building was most popularly known as part of the Dunham's Department Store in the 1950s and '60s, and it carries a lighted sign for Dunhams on the corner overlooking State and Broad Streets.

## Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1929-1934.
2. Architect: William Klemann
3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of Title references from the Mercer County Hall of Records unless otherwise noted:
  - 1928 July 3 - Transfer from the First National Bank of Trenton to the First Mechanics National Bank of Trenton. Deed book 641 page 122, 124.
  - 1930 December 1 - Transfer from the First Mechanics National Bank of Trenton to Mechanics Realty Corp., a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 675 page 113.
  - 1932 March 30 - Transfer from the Mechanics Realty Corporation to the First Mechanics National Bank of Trenton. Deed book 693 page 152.
  - 1945 April 16 - Transfer from the First Mechanics National Bank of Trenton to East Broad and State Corp., a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 888 page 563.
  - 1954 May 19 - Transfer from East Broad and State Corp. to Paul-James, Inc. and Aresty Realty Inc., New Jersey corporations. Deed book 1280 page 508.
  - 1974 February 15 - Transfer from Paul-James, Inc. and Aresty Realty Inc. to Plapinger-Platt Downtown Properties, a partnership. Deed book 1962 page 434.
  - 1987 September - Transfer from Plapinger-Platt Downtown Properties to DKM Properties Corp.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not Known.
5. Original plans and construction: Original plans or drawings not known to exist.
6. Alterations and additions: The original fourteen first floor stores have been consolidated and reconfigured into seven. All the street facades of the storefronts have been altered except that at 32 East State Street, which seems to have survived intact from the 1930s. The upper floors of the exterior and the main entry to the building have not been altered; however, the interior of the upper floors has been greatly altered for the changing need of various offices housed within the building.

- B. Historical Context: The Wallach Building site has been a bustling corner in the heart of downtown Trenton's commercial area since the early 19th century. In the 1920's The First National Bank of Trenton began to consolidate ownership of the nine existing buildings on the corner of East State and Broad Streets, so that by 1928, the entire site could be sold for development. The existing buildings were razed, and construction on the new four story block began in 1929.

The Wallach Building was designed by William Klemann, a local architect who died in 1929, shortly after completing the plans. A few years earlier, Klemann also designed the new facade for the expanded Dunham's Department Store, located next door to the Wallach Building on North Broad Street. The Wallach Building was a conscious attempt to create a modern building in an aging downtown, and its fireproof construction was unique in the block of older buildings. Its chaste decoration, derived from simplification of classical motifs, was subordinated to the large window walls, giving the monolithic building a very light and open appearance.

Although largely constructed by the end of 1930, the economic changes of the Depression slowed completion and finishing of the building. The Wallach Building was not fully occupied until 1934. As built, the structure contained 14 stores and a narrow lobby on the first floor, and three floors of office space above.

The tenants listed in the 1935 Trenton City Directory reflect the variety of professions represented in the upstairs offices. A sub-post office was located on the second floor, as were a photographer, a real estate agent, a dentist, a beauty shop, and a firm of tailors. The third floor included offices for a chiropractor, a small law firm, a painter and an insurance company. The State Labor Department had offices on the third and fourth floors, the first in nearly half a century of office rentals in the building by the State of New Jersey. The State Fire Warden also had offices upstairs, along with a pair of lawyers who shared their office space with the Trenton Historical Society. The shops on the first floor also hosted a series of tenants in the 1930's and '40's, including shoe stores, hat shops, jewelers, florists, and beauticians.

In 1954, the Wallach Building was purchased by the Dunham's Department Store. Dunham's, established in 1867, was by the 1950's the premier retailer in downtown Trenton, outgrowing its buildings at 11-15 North Broad Street. Dunham's purchased

the Wallach Building, (and several other buildings in the block) and expanded their retail and office space by creating internal access to these adjoining buildings. The largest first floor store within the Wallach Building was thus annexed to Dunham's, and the second floor was taken over as office space with direct access from the original Dunham's building at 11 North Broad Street. Although the carved entablature over the lobby entrance continued to read "Wallach Building", a large lighted sign mounted over the corner of East State Street and Broad Street proclaimed "Dunhams".

The decline of downtown Trenton in the 1960s and '70s was mirrored in the lack of maintenance to the Wallach Building (and most others in the area), shabby attempts at storefront renovation which robbed the building of overall aesthetic unity or architectural integrity, and the loss of tenants from the building.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: A four story commercial building on a prominent corner location, notable for its fireproof construction, large window walls, and simplified classical detailing representative of commercial architecture in the 1930's.
2. Condition of Fabric: The Wallach Building is generally in fair to good condition. The exterior stone facing is in good condition, although the steel window frames and decorative spandrels are rusting and deteriorating. The interior suffers from heavy use and little maintenance, and all surface materials (paints, carpets, ceiling tile, etc.) are in poor condition.

### B. Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: The corner building measures 137.35' along the East State Street elevation, and 105.13' along the North Broad Street elevation. It is a nearly rectangular building in plan. There are seven evenly spaced bays along the East State Street elevation, and four on the North Broad Street side.

2. Foundation: The foundation is made of poured concrete. Polished pink granite is applied around the base of the main entry of the building, although the foundation itself is not visible from the exterior of the building.
3. Walls: The building is faced with smooth cut limestone on the upper floors. A broad entablature with molded cornice extends across each facade of the building above the first floor level. The large bays are separated by flat pilasters with carved ornament at the base. A stylized swan's neck pediment motif accents the parapet above each bay divider; a relief carving of a swag and oval rosette are beneath the parapet at the roofline level. The parapet is composed of a baluster of brick piers topped by a stone railing.
4. Structural system: Steel frame construction with curtain walls. Concrete floors and one foot thick tile and brick walls were used to make the building fireproof.
5. Storefronts, bulkheads, etc.: The seven surviving storefronts have all been greatly altered with a variety of materials, including tile, brick, wooden shingles, and metal panels. All are different from each other, and from their original design. The storefront at 32 East State Street is the least altered of the group. It features a central entry, deeply recessed from the street behind extended show windows. The plate glass windows are framed by narrow bands of metal, and they project over the low, granite-faced bulkhead. The storefront is topped by a metal case for an awning. The transom area is designed to contain a sign, although the present one is too small for the space. On the southeast corner of the Wallach Building, facing the busy intersection of East State Street and North Broad Street, is a large vertical wall-mounted sign which says "Dunhams" in white neon letters against a sky-blue metal panel background.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick, square-section chimneys on the roof. They serve as exhausts for the heating system.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The main doorway to the Wallach Building is located at 8B East State Street. It is a round-arched doorway, flanked by stone pilasters with carved Ionic capitals, and a console in place of a keystone. Above the doorway, in the entablature, the words "WALLACH BUILDING" are carved between two oval rosettes. This classically inspired door enframingent surrounds a pair

of bronze-finished doors with large clear lights. The metal door frame is accented by an abstract triangular pattern at the top. Above it stands a sculptural cast metal acroterion. The semi-circular transom is clear glass with WALLACH BLDG painted in gold lettering on it. A bronze plaque with the address 88 E. State Street is located on the pilaster to the left of the doors. Holes in the stone indicate that other signs had been attached above and below, but have subsequently been removed.

- b. Windows: The second and third floor windows are grouped together within a double height painted metal frame. Each bay is divided into thirds with a fixed middle window and operable louver-type windows on either side. The narrow transoms above each window were also originally operable. Attenuated fluted columns divide the windows within each bay. Between the second and third floors there is a painted metal spandrel with a raised design featuring a shield. The fourth floor windows are also tripartite in metal frames, but their vertical division is by a simple flat pilaster strip. The top corners of the window are rounded, and there is no decorative lintel or sill.

- 8. Roof: A flat roof covers the building. It is gently pitched toward the north. It is covered with asphalt and tar paper. An elevator headhouse is found in the center of the roof.

### C. Description of Interior

#### 1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement is divided into several rooms to house the boiler, maintenance equipment, and other service functions. The walls, floors, and ceilings are concrete, although the boiler room is partly brick, painted with metallic paint.
- b. First floor: The first floor is divided into seven discrete storefronts, each entered from the street. The entrance into the Wallach Building at 88 East State Street leads through a barrel vaulted hall into a small lobby in the interior of the building, where a pair of elevators and a steel staircase lead to upper floors.
- c. Second, Third, and Fourth floors: The upper floors of the Wallach Building interconnect with the adjoining Dunham's Department Store. Renovations of the upper

floors have taken place over the years, and the most recent work has included tiled and carpeted floors, dropped ceilings with acoustical tile, plywood paneling or sheetrock on the walls. The finishes and layout of the upper floors have been so thoroughly altered that the original configuration and materials are no longer visible.

2. Stairways: A steel staircase leads from the basement to the fourth floor. It is arranged with parallel flights requiring a 180 degree turn on the landing between each floor. The quarter-round metal handrail rests on square-section metal balusters which are alternately straight or twisted.
3. Flooring: The flooring throughout the building is concrete, covered by a variety of types of wall-to-wall carpeting or linoleum tile.
4. Walls and ceilings: The first floor hallway is the most decorative and architecturally interesting space in the building. It has a plaster barrel vaulted ceiling which continues the arch found in the main doorway's transom into the interior. The vault is accented by ornamental strapwork in plaster. A frieze at cornice height features an egg and dart molding and dentil molding. Polished pink marble covers the hall walls over a slate "baseboard." Double bronze doors, like those leading from the street, open from the hall to the elevator lobby.  
The elevator lobby has plaster walls, but a replacement plastic baseboard strip, and dropped ceilings with acoustical tile replace original detailing. The walls and ceilings throughout the rest of the building were originally plaster, but much has been covered by the application of dropped ceilings with acoustical tiles and plywood paneling.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Interior doors have been removed from the upper floors in favor of an "open office" concept of modular partitions and cubicles. Where doors do exist, they are plain steel fire doors in steel frames.
  - b. Windows: Steel frame windows are noted under exterior description.



6. Decorative features and trim: None which have not been noted.
7. Hardware: Original hardware at windows and surviving doors is indistinguishable from contemporary utilitarian hardware.
8. Mechanical Equipment:  
Heating: The massive iron furnace in the basement, originally coal fired and now oil-burning, provides steam heat to the Wallach Building. With renovation of the upper story offices in the 1960s and '70s, new forced air heating and cooling systems were installed, with the metal ductwork hidden above dropped ceilings, and the main units placed on the roof.

Elevators: There are two elevators rising up through the center of the building. The side-by-side shafts feature single paneled bronze doors. The half-circle floor indicator above each set of doors uses a hand much like a clock to show the elevator cab's location.

#### D. Site:

1. General siting and orientation: The Wallach Building is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of North Broad and East State Streets. It is in the heart of the commercial and retail center of Trenton. In the 1970's, East State Street between North Warren and Montgomery Streets was transformed to a pedestrian mall. Thus the main entrance to the Wallach Building is from this mall rather than from a street. The building is flanked to the west by 26 East State Street, and to the north by the Dunham's Department Store at 11-15 North Broad Street.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

#### Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Not Known.
- B. Early views: None identified.
- C. Interviews: Mr. Robert Platt, former owner. August 1987.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- a. Real estate transactions, Mercer County Hall of Records, Trenton, New Jersey.
- b. Tax assessment records, Tax Office, City of Trenton.

2. Secondary and published sources:

a. Books:

Directory of Trenton, New Jersey. Trenton, N.J. [title and publisher varies], 1930-1971.

Trenton, City of. North Ward Historic Resource Survey. Vol. 1. City of Trenton, N.J., 1980.

b. Maps

Insurance Maps Trenton, New Jersey. Vol. 1, New York: Sanborn Map Company. 1908; revised 1927 and 1944.

Insurance Maps Trenton, New Jersey. Vol. I, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1955.

c. Periodicals

Trenton Chamber of Commerce. Trenton Magazine. August 1929, p. 8.

Trenton Chamber of Commerce. Trenton Magazine. October 1929, p. 108.

Trenton Chamber of Commerce. Trenton Magazine. August 1934.

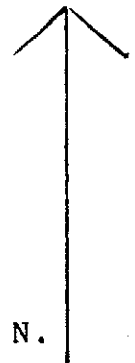
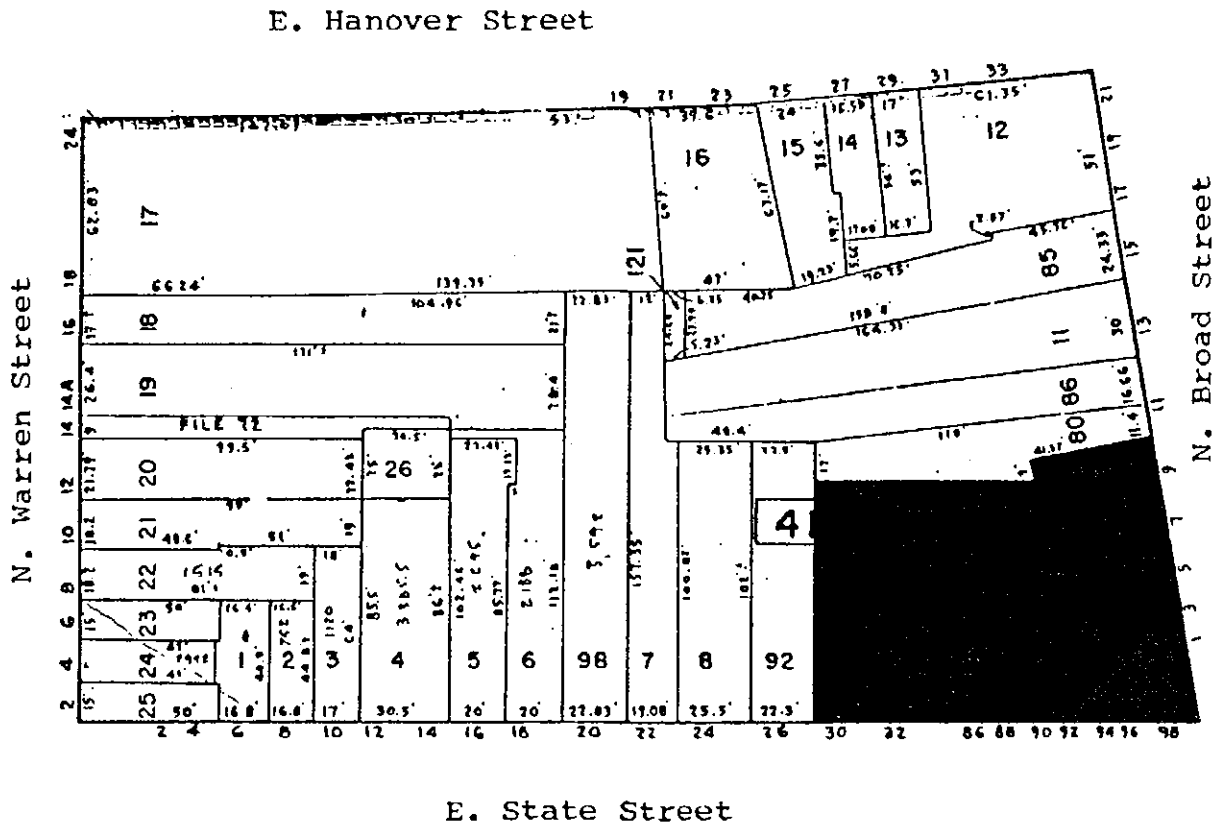
Trenton Chamber of Commerce. Trenton Magazine. June 1954, p. 12.

Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation for The Wallach Building was prepared for DKM Properties Corp. under an agreement with the City of Trenton, the Office of New Jersey Heritage, and DKM Properties Corp. The site was recorded to HABS standards to mitigate the loss of historic buildings, impacted by a project utilizing funds from HUD through an Urban Development Action Grant. The site is under development by DKM Properties as the Capital Center project, a mixed retail and office building containing 331,000 square feet. It is scheduled for completion in 1989.

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August-December 1987

Site Plan



Floor Plan

